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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN - ASTANA CELEBRATES 10TH ANNIVERSARY IN GRAND  
STYLE

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (SBU) Astana celebrated its 10th anniversary as Kazakhstan's capital on July 6. The jubilee consisted of a week of events, ranging from monument dedications and gala concerts to an official anniversary ceremony attended by nine foreign heads of state, including Russian President Medvedev. The government appeared to spare no expense in preparing Astana for the anniversary -- with work continuing around the clock in recent months to pave roads, finish off key construction projects, and bedeck the city with festive billboards and placards. In his speech at the official ceremony, President Nazarbayev justified his decision to move the capital to Astana as in Kazakhstan's "strategic interests." The glitzy city has become a point of genuine pride for a sizeable portion of the population. End Summary.

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GRAND CELEBRATION  
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¶2. (SBU) Astana celebrated its 10th anniversary as Kazakhstan's capital in grand style. Astana's "birthday" is officially July 6 -- moved from a date in early June several years ago to improve the chances for good weather and to coincide with President Nazarbayev's birthday -- but the 10th anniversary events extended a whole week, from June 30 through July 7. (Note: Elsewhere in Kazakhstan the celebration actually began earlier, with events scheduled on a rolling basis in the country's oblast centers. End Note.) The beginning of the festivities overlapped with the annual meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, which Astana hosted from June 28 to July 3. Immediately before going out of session for the summer, parliament passed legislation making the "Day of the Capital" a permanent national holiday -- and thus a day off from work.

¶3. (SBU) The domestic credit crunch resulting from the global financial crisis had stalled many of Astana's key construction projects since last year. Beginning in the spring, however, the government embarked on a crash effort to complete as many as possible for the 10th anniversary. Remarkable progress was made in a short period, though some notable projects did not get finished in time -- including a new bridge spanning the city's Ishim River, a massive new concert hall (the "Palace of Independence") around the corner from the Embassy, and a domed sports stadium. (Note: The official 10th anniversary ceremony with foreign heads of states in attendance could thus not be conducted in the concert hall, as planned, but rather had to be moved across the street to Astana's "Peace and Reconciliation" pyramid. However, a gala jubilee concert was nevertheless staged in the unfinished stadium, amid exposed rafters and girders. End Note.) In the run up to the celebration, the government also repaved Astana's major streets -- many simultaneously, causing major traffic snarls for weeks -- and repaired sidewalks all over town. An army of several thousand laborers, many seemingly migrants from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, was mobilized for the work. Almost overnight, more than a dozen new monuments were erected around the capital, each one a "gift" from

one of Kazakhstan's oblasts. The monuments were unveiled and dedicated during the 10th anniversary festivities.

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"FROM ASTANA WITH LOVE"  
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14. (SBU) The government also designed an attractive "Astana 10" logo and branded the celebration with a motto -- "From Astana with Love."

Virtually every single billboard in Astana, thousands of lampposts, and the corrugated metal walls surrounding hundreds of construction sites were festooned with giant placards, banners, and posters bearing the logo, motto (in Kazakh, Russian, and English, in Nazarbayev's own handwriting), and other graphic designs created for the jubilee. The logo also made its way onto pins, tee shirts, baseball caps, and knapsacks -- and was painted on buses all over the country. Astana city authorities set up a trilingual website -- [www.astana10.com](http://www.astana10.com) -- to publicize the celebration. The site includes a glitzy ad-agency style webpage entitled "celebration concept," which lists such "aims" for the anniversary event as "the positioning of the first president of the Republic of Kazakhstan as a leader of world-scale" and "confirmation of the correctness of the decision to move the capital."

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THIRTY-TWO CRITERIA FOR MOVING THE CAPITAL  
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15. (SBU) The key 10th anniversary events took place over the July 5-6 weekend. On those days, the streets of Astana's cavernous government quarter were full as perhaps never before -- with a notably large number of Kazakh speakers, an indication that

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thousands traveled or were bused in to the city from the provinces. Nine foreign heads of state -- Russian President Medvedev (making his second trip to Astana since taking office), Turkish President Gul, Georgia's Saakashvili, Armenia's Sargsyan, Azerbaijan's Aliyev, Kyrgyzstan's Bakiyev, Tajikistan's Rakhmon, Turkmenistan's Berdymukhamedov, and Jordan's King Abdullah -- attended the official 10th anniversary ceremony on July 5, a VIP event that included several hours of speeches. In his own address, Nazarbayev justified the transfer of the capital to Astana as having been compelled by the "strategic interests of the nation." He claimed that 32 criteria had been taken into account in selecting the location of the new capital, including socio-economic indicators, the environment, labor resources, transport infrastructure, and -- oddly enough, given the ultimate choice of sub-Siberian Astana -- climate.

Describing nine ways in which Astana had fundamentally changed the life of the country, Nazarbayev contended that moving the capital there had "completed the process the constructing Kazakhstan's new statehood," created social mobility, and facilitated the revival of a "governing elite." Astana, he argued, had significantly grown in international significance, and was a clear example of innovative architecture and of the nation's success.

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"FROM MOSCOW WITH LOVE"  
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16. (SBU) On the evening of July 5, Astana hosted a spectacular five-hour "From Moscow with Love" concert, a gift from Moscow mayor Yuriy Luzhkov, who flew in a number of big-name performers for the event, from the aging Latvian pop star Laima Vaikule to the ageless Russian crooner Iosif Kobzon. Dima Bilan, the 2008 Eurovision Song Contest winner, was the finale act. Luzhkov himself was invited to Astana for the 10th anniversary festivities together with another 100 or so big city mayors. A session of the International Forum of Capitals and Large Cities was held on the margins of the jubilee.

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"ASTANA - MY HEART"  
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17. (SBU) On July 6, Nazarbayev participated in the dedication of the

Kazakh Yeli ("Kazakh nation") monument, a 91-meter tall obelisk positioned in front of the Palace of Independence (see para 3 above) -- with its height symbolizing 1991, the year Kazakhstan gained its statehood. That evening, Nazarbayev hosted a private dinner for senior government officials, other Kazakhstani elites, and foreign ambassadors. Nazarbayev sat at the head table, together with his closest political confidants -- including Senate chairman Tokayev, Astana mayor Tasmagambetov, Nur Otan Party deputy chairman Dzhaksybekov, and Astana Musical Academy rector Ayman Mukhahodzhayeva. Also at the head table were wife Sara and daughter Dariga. In remarks to those present, after describing the contributions of the various categories of guests (ministers, regional governors, Presidential Administration, intelligentsia and the diplomatic corps) Nazarbayev praised his wife in glowing terms -- an unexpected gesture given that she had appeared to be sidelined in recent years. Ukrainian pop star Sofia Rotary performed at the dinner and enticed Nazarbayev onto the dance floor.

18. (SBU) After the dinner, Nazarbayev attended a gala VIP show, "Astana - My Heart," staged in an amphitheater in front of Astana's "White House" and broadcast live on national television. This show was dominated by Kazakh folk and pop performers, though Sofia Rotary proved to be the crowd pleaser and American star Whitney Houston sang several numbers as the closing act -- which was following by a thundering fireworks display.

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VICTORY ON THE GOLF COURSE  
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19. (SBU) The Astana jubilee would not have been complete without sports activities. An enthusiastic tennis fan, Nazarbayev, accompanied by Cypriot tennis star Marcos Baghdatis, opened up a modern new Astana tennis center, where international tournaments will be played. Nazarbayev also played in a golf tournament at Astana's sole golf club (riding around the course in a miniaturized Cadillac Escalade golf-cart). Other tournament participants included senior government officials, business leaders, and representatives of the diplomatic community. Players were paired up into two-man teams. One Embassy Astana staffer -- a former golf pro -- was paired with Minister of Industry and Trade Vladimir Shkolnik. Though no scores were released, he and Shkolnik were declared to have come in second place. The crowd applauded wildly when Nazarbayev and his partner were announced to be the winners.

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COMMENT

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110. (SBU) Love it or hate it, Astana has made great strides in just a few short years. Its rapid transformation from sleepy, remote, provincial city to gleaming national capital is the most remarkable development in the country's post-independence period, topping even the discovery and exploitation of Kazakhstan's vast Caspian crude reserves. Though many Kazakhstanis -- notably the Almaty elite -- still deeply resent the transfer of the capital and the money spent moving it (\$7 billion thus far, according to Nazarbayev himself), Astana is a point of pride for millions of the country's citizens. It may very well prove to be President Nazarbayev's most lasting legacy -- a futuristic steel, concrete, and glass "monument" that endures and perhaps even thrives well beyond the date when Kazakhstan's hydrocarbon resources are fully exhausted. End Comment.

Pictures of the event can be found on the Embassy's site at

<http://kazakhstan.usembassy.gov/news07062008.html>

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